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ABSTRACT

Decentralized school systems make the principal's role more complex in the U.S. than in Australia's highly centralized system. Principals are pivotal to school success in both countries. A principal sets a school's climate, affecting decision-making, communications, educational innovations, and teacher morale, while performing formal tasks regarding curriculum, pupil and staff performance, physical facilities, school-community relations, and administration. However, comparison of the two countries reveals five differences that strongly influence the principal's role. First, U.S. preservice preparation demands more formal professional requirements from principals. Second, the principal selection process in Australia emphasizes seniority and service longevity, while the U.S. process is more competitive. Third, school funding is local in the U.S. but national in Australia, making U.S. principals more vulnerable to "environmental" influences. Fourth, U.S. schools have more programs and activities for which the principal is responsible. Fifth, principals' jobs are more secure in Australia, where principals have tenure, guaranteed salaries, and seniority and transfer rights, and are not subject to local funding changes. Thus the decentralized school system's stronger, more diverse organizational and environmental inputs make the principal's role in the U.S. more complex and dynamic than in Australia. Interview notes give additional information on U.S. principals. (RW)

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THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES

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SYNOPSIS

In this paper the role of the school principal in the United States of America and Australia will be examined.

First, the central place of the principal in both countries will be examined. Second, the role of the principal will be discussed. Third, some differences in the USA and Australia will be presented and their effect on the principal's role in both countries examined. Fourth, in conclusion, these findings will be related to the system model.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The position of principal in any school system is pivotal to the success of that system whether in the centralized Australian system or the decentralized American system.[1] The principalship is a powerful role because of its position in the school system. The school unit is the place where resources are applied, where innovations occur, and the principal regulates these things. Hence, the success or failure of any school system will be dependent on the way the principal at the school level executes his role.

Mitchell stated in the conclusion of a national study conducted for the Ford Foundation that:

> Many reformers have placed the blame for the deadening effects of the education bureaucracy on the teachers. But teachers do not run the schools. The principals are both the de facto and de jure managers of the entire enterprise. The system of public education is such a large operation that it is extremely difficult to fasten on a point of entry to attain improvement. But standing as he does at the school-house door, the principal is easily identifiable as the key determiner of climate.[2]

The principalship as the focal administrative role of the school system bears some study because as Kiernan claimed: "The principal sets the

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[1] This assertion is well supported in the literature. G. Bernbaum, "The Role of the Head," ed. R. S. Peters, The Role of the Head (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), p. 34; G. Baron, "The Role of the Head" ed. B. L. Allen, Headship in the 197C's (London: Blackwell, 1968), p. 6; R. F. Campbell, et al, Introduction to Educational Administration (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1977, fifth edition), p. 244.

[2] D. P. Mitchell, Leadership in Public Education Study: A Look at the Overlooked (Washington, D.C.: Academy for Educational Development, Inc., 1973), p. 13.

climate of the school and is the most important and influential individual in the building."[3]

In a recent publication, a model was proposed for analyzing school organization.[4] Each school was thought to be affected by the following factors: formal organization; informal organization; individual members; physical environment; and the role of the principal. It was argued that the key factor in any school organization was the principal because he had great power and authority in the formal structure. The way that the role of principal is carried out in gate keeping functions or pass through functions in any school will determine: how decisions are made; the quality and kind of communication system; the work climate for teachers; the morale of teachers; how much innovation is carried on; and the reward structure of the school. The way power is exercised by the principal and the assumptions he holds about staff, parents and children will determine the way people will perform in that school. In McGregor's[5] words, he has a Theory X[6] view of human nature. This will produce a contrasting climate to a Theory Y[7] view of human nature. So the way he conceives his role and the skills he develops to carry out the role of principal are very important, even though difficult to define.

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[3]O. B. Kiernan, "The Role of the School Principal," A Newsletter from the Executive Secretary of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (January 15, 1973) reporting upon The Report of the Select Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity, December 31, 1972.

[4]A. D. Geering, "Approaches to School Administration" (Adelaide: Torrens College of Advanced Education, 1978).

[5]D. McGregor, The Human Side of Enterprise (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1960).

[6]Ibid., pp. 33-34.

[7]Ibid., pp. 47-48.

A very important review was carried out by Saranson of the principalship. He established the importance of the position by stating that:

> We begin with the principal because any kind of system change puts him in the role of implementing the change in his school. I have yet to see any proposal for system change that did not assume the presence of a principal in a school. I have yet to see in any of these proposals the slightest recognition of the possibility that the principal, by virtue of role, preparation, and tradition, may not be a good implementor of change. If this turns out to be the case, it clearly forces one to reconsider one's goals of change.[8]

The centrality of the role of the principal is well established in Australian schools. For example, in one Australian state, principals have been given complete control of their schools.

> Let me say at the outset that you as Head of your school, by delegated authority from the Minister and Director-General, are in undisputed control of your school. . . . Just as you have professional freedom and delegated authority, so too the same privileges should be extended to your staff, who in turn must accept your ultimate authority in the school and the stake that parents and students have in what goes on in schools.[9]

But one wonders whether principals in South Australia possess the necessary skills to develop their schools in terms of the intent of the Freedom and Authority Memoranda. No substantive studies have been undertaken to examine this factor in South Australia but Mr. Jones, on the eve of his retirement, issued a postscript to his famous memorandum in which he stated that:

> A few principals, allegedly, did not read past the second paragraph which concerned their undisputed control of the school. . . . Some teachers reported that principals were less democratic in their schools after the issue of the memorandum, although such reports are becoming fewer and weaker.[10]

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[8] S. B. Saranson, The Culture of the School and the Problem of Change (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1971), pp. 111-112.

[9] A. W. Jones, Freedom and Authority Memorandum (Adelaide: Education Department of South Australia, August, 1970).

[10] A. W. Jones, Freedom and Authority: A Postscript (Adelaide: Education Department of South Australia, August, 1977).

It is debatable whether this is true or not. A national study of elementary principals in the United States revealed that:

> Regardless of these major handicaps, however, it may be that the elementary school principal avoids performing some of the duties he claims he should be handling. For example, principals say that they would like to have more time for the supervision of teachers; many principals, however, admit that they do not have the necessary skills to develop adequate supervisory programs within their buildings. Others say they would like to have more time for program planning and evaluation, but they assert that they have neither knowledge nor skill to determine how to involve teachers or how to get teachers to accept the results.[11]

A study of Australian primary school principals would probably reveal the same self-confessed weaknesses.[12]

Katz has stated that successful administration is dependent upon three primary skill areas--technical skill, human skill, and conceptual skill. When we concentrate upon what a principal can do--performance--we are concerned with "the kinds of skills which [principals] exhibit in carrying out their jobs effectively."[13] This leads us on to a consideration of the role of the school principal.

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[11] K. Goldhammer, G. Becker, R. Withycombe, F. Doyal, E. Miller, C. Morgan, L. Delorette, and B. Aldredge, Elementary School Principals and Their Schools: Beacons of Brilliance and Potholes of Pestilence (Eugene: Center for the Advanced Study of Educational Administration, University of Oregon Press, 1971), pp. 6-7.

[12] The researcher has discussed this problem with many school principals in Australia over the past four years and the Education Department of South Australia has developed many in-service courses to try and overcome the deficiencies of many principals.

[13] W. L. Pharis, Inservice Education of Elementary School Principals (Washington, D.C.: Department of Elementary School Principals, 1966), p. 17.

2. ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL

The role of the school principal, like any role, can be conceptualized in terms of two primary components: the task component and the style component.

There have been a number of studies and prescriptions over the last 50 years which have identified the tasks of the school principal. In 1925, Strayer et al identified ten tasks of the school principal: business administration of schools; school publicity; buildings and equipment; census and attendance; classification and progress of children; supervision of instruction; curricula and courses of study; records and reports; extra-curricular activities; and personnel management.[14]

In 1962, Campbell et al listed a similar number of functions: school-community relationships; curriculum development; pupil personnel; staff personnel; physical facilities; finance and business management; and organization and structure.[15]

In a book on the principalship published six years ago, Jacobson identified the following tasks of the school principal: making a school schedule; instructional leadership; educational diagnosis; evaluating student progress; guidance; pupil personnel concerns; managing extra-curricular activities; teacher personnel problems; records and reports, supervising non-instructional personnel; and the principal in the community.[16]

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[14] G. D. Strayer and N. L. Engelhardt, Problems in Educational Administration (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1925).

[15] R. F. Campbell, J. E. Corbally, Jr., and J. A. Ramseyer, Introduction to Educational Administration (2nd ed.; Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1962).

[16] P. B. Jacobson, J. D. Logsdon, and R. R. Wiegman, The Principalship: New Perspectives (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1973).

Finally a book which described a collaborative project between the Atlanta Public Schools and the University Council for Educational Administration, identified six task domains associated with the role of the principal: initiating and responding to social change; preparing the organization for effective response; decision-making; achieving effective human relations and morale; administering and improving the instructional program; and evaluating school processes and products.[17]

So, the functions prescribed by text book writers over the last 50 years are remarkably consistent, despite differences of specific emphasis. It has shown in the brief review of literature that there is some broad agreement on the task domains commonly associated with the role of the school principal.

How will this role definition differ in different countries? In the next section some observations are made about the roles of the school principal in Australia and the United States of America.

3. THE PRINCIPALSHIP IN AUSTRALIA AND THE USA

In contrast to Australia's highly centralized systems of education in its states, education in the United States has been highly decentralized with strong local participation, representation, control and accountability. Even in the USA, there are a number of differences between school districts, e.g., some school districts are quite centralized in their operations whereas others operate in a decentralized way.

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[17] J. A. Culbertson, C. Henson, and R. Morrison, Performance Objectives for School Principals: Concepts and Instruments (Berkeley: McCutchan, 1974).

However, there are a number of differences between both countries which influence the role of principal. First, the preservice preparation of principals in the USA is quite different from that in Australia. School principals in the USA are required to undertake a master's degree in school administration and be certified by the state before they can be employed. By contrast, in Australia school principals are not required to undertake professional courses in school administration nor are they required to be certified by the state. This, of course, must affect the way that principals approach their roles: in the former country, at least principals would have some understanding of their role through their professional study whereas in Australia beginning principals would lack knowledge of their role. Second, the selection of principals is another source of difference in the interpretation of the role of the school principal. In the USA, vacancies for school principals are advertised widely and openly. Outside consultants such as Selection Research Incorporated may also be involved in the selection procedure.

In Australia, the process of selecting educational administrators in state schools is similar in all states. An applicant at the primary school level requires an appropriate efficiency assessment by a visiting inspector and the principal, the basic teaching qualification, and sufficient seniority to win over other applicants. Usually there are a "pool" of qualified applicants whose names are ranked in order on a promotion list. In secondary schools, the same process occurs except that applicants usually hold the position of Senior Master/Mistress, in charge of a subject area before being eligible for promotion to Deputy Principal/Principal. Some variations occur such as allowing people who obtain an above average efficiency assessment to move up a certain position on the list.

In South Australia, some vacancies for principals are advertised as "open" positions, and anyone on the promotion list may apply. In addition, a special category "Principal Class A," has been advertised openly in the press for the last few years and anyone within the Department or outside the Department may apply. Predictably, most appointments go to "insiders." An interesting research paper by Professor Richard Carlson showed that most job vacancies in the Western Australian Education Department were filled by "insiders" and that experience and seniority were the most important factors in the selection process.[18]

The policy of appointment to principal in state school systems in Australia places much emphasis on seniority, longevity of service, etc., and next to no emphasis on credentials, academic and professional nor identifiable competencies. Criteria for promotion seem to be poorly defined both conceptually and operationally. As most Australian principals are usually promoted from the ranks of teachers, they see their roles as teachers and instructional leaders.

Saronson found that the longer the teaching experience the less effective a person was as a principal.[19] He further disputed the myth of the instructional leader on the grounds that nothing in the experience of a teacher adequately prepared him for the principalship. Saronson concluded that "being a teacher for a number of years may be in most instances antithetical to being an educational leader or vehicle for change."[20]

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[18] R. O. Carlson, "Job Vacancies in Western Australian Schools," (unpublished paper, ACEA Conference, Brisbane, 1977).

[19] S. B. Saronson, The Culture of the School and the Problem of Change (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1971), pp. 111-112.

[20] Ibid., pp. 112-114.

Third, the funding base of schools in Australia is quite different from that in the USA. Public schools in Australia are totally funded by income tax revenue which the various states receive from the federal government. In contrast, state education in the USA is supported primarily by property taxes at the local level. This causes the school to be more vulnerable to environmental influences and means that teachers and principals will feel more accountable to their local communities, and this will dramatically effect the way a principal conceives his role. In contrast, Australian schools, despite the attempts of several states to develop school councils for local parent representation, remain quite insulated and unresponsive to local participation and influence. Of course, strong community participation can have negative effects too, and this is acknowledged.

Fourth, the role of a school principal in the USA is more complex than that in Australia for a number of reasons. American schools have a much greater range of programs and activities than Australian schools--some of these are dictated by federal and state laws and include: extensive provisions for special education students up to age 21 years; a wide range of activities which encompass a large number of programs requiring full-time coaching staff; hot lunch programs; supervision of specialist employees--school nurses, psychologists, counsellors, etc.; federal requirements to remove discrimination between male/female participation in all programs; a more flexible extensive academic program; in some districts the hiring and firing of staff; and extensive budget powers. Whereas in Australia, each school being part of a centralized system does not have a lot of these responsibilities nor the range of other things listed above. Further, because of this additional responsibility, the principal in the USA has more

freedom in a decentralized system than his counterpart in Australia who is hemmed in by regulations, memoranda, etc., from the central office. Consequently, the role of the principal is quite different from that of the principal in American schools.

Fifth, the basis of employment is different in both countries. Australian teachers and principals in each state are employed under an Education Act which guarantees them: security of tenure; the opportunity of transfer from one school to another in various parts of the state; seniority privileges and the opportunity to be placed on a promotion list; and a guaranteed salary which is determined on a state-wide basis by a government tribunal. In contrast principals and teachers in the USA are: usually employed on a yearly contract; have to negotiate their salary through collective bargaining; have to compete for a job with other applicants if they move from their school district for promotion; have no security of tenure or seniority privileges; and their jobs are very vulnerable to funding trends in the community, e.g, in Nebraska, USA, two school districts (Omaha and Nebraska City) have been limited to a 0 percent increase in their budget in 1979-80 fiscal year and this has led to a reduction in the teaching force. So, the way principals perceive their role and carry it out will be quite different in both countries because of these influences.

4. CONCLUSION

When one applies the systems model to education in the USA and Australia, the following observations can be made:

1. Organizational inputs in the USA are much more diverse than in Australia.

2. Environmental inputs are very strong and influential in the USA whereas environmental influences on schools in Australia are limited owing to a strong entrenched bureaucratic system and a heavily "domesticated" school system.

3. The feedback from the environment from schools in the USA is strong whereas it is weak in Australia because of the aforementioned reasons and different cultural background.

4. Control, maintenance and coordination factors are highly centralized in Australia and highly decentralized in the USA.

In summary, education in the USA seems to be part of a dynamic open developing system whereas education in Australia appears to be a much more closed system which ultimately will tend towards atrophy. Consequently, because of the influence of these system variables, the role of the principal is quite different in both countries.

As Morphet et al claimed:

> Who then has the knowledge and compentecy to define the principal's role? When it is further realized that the social issues, the complex relationships, and modern technology, themselves are in the process of formation and emergence, it can be seen that the task of defining the principal's role is not a simple one of definition or of deciding between two general viewpoints.[21]

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[21] E. Morphet, R. Johns, and T. Reller, Educational Organization and Administration (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1974), pp. 374-375.

THE ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL

Questions

1. What do you believe is the role of the principal?
2. How does the external environment impact on the role of the principal?
3. Does school district decentralization make a difference to the role of the school principal?
4. What power does the principal have?
5. How does this effect your relationship to:
   a. curriculum?
   b. personnel?
   c. student relations?
   d. hiring, firing staff?
6. Does the principal have more freedom in a decentralized system than in a centralized one?

I. Pound Junior High School

I visited this school for half a day and had lunch with the staff. Unfortunately the principal was detained at a meeting and so my discussion with him was brief. The main points are included below:

1. He believed that the principal's main role was to be a facilitator to help people help themselves.
2. He thought that the external environment impacted on the school in three ways:
   a. Social structure of the area--one parent families.
   b. Affluences level resulted in more open criticism but also good support.
3. He felt that a decentralized system allowed a principal more responsibility and autonomy--"power within reasonable guidelines."

II. Lincoln Christian School

I visited this school also for half a day. The main points of my discussion with him are included below.

1. He saw his role as: a manager; team leader in curriculum; facilitator; coordinator; carrying out the school board's policy; acting as an authority for students; and above all as an administrator to make the teachers' work (who are key in the school) easier and more effective by supplying what they need to get on with the job.
2. The other questions weren't relevant so we discussed such things as: selection of teachers; qualifications for teaching at the school; program; policy-formation; student council activities; parent-teacher responsibility for children; purpose of school; and relationship of school to family role and church role.

III. Lincoln East High School

This was my first visit to a big American high school--its facilities were very impressive. I happened to choose the day on which they were playing the state football championship which they won that same night. The pep rally went on for 25 minutes and included: interviews with three members of the 1975 winning team; a display by the 1975 cheer squad; a look at the 1975 game by Father Time; a speech by the sports writer for the Star; and much cheering. music and fun.

The principal spent quite some time with me explaining the structure of the school, its program and problems.

1. He saw his role as setting climate, establishing direction; and making the final decisions. He also saw the need to be involved

with some of the children and some of the teachers in professional development programs.

2. He felt that research showed that change only occurred at the building level and therefore he was trying to foster change.
3. He said he wouldn't do as well in a centralized system where he would be more a building manager rather than an educational leader.
4. He felt that there was a lot of flexibility with a 12-month contract.
5. He was trying to personally adopt a different theme each year--his theme for 1979-80 was professional development.
6. He felt a need to follow through on situations and consequences, particularly with problem students and staff, regardless of what intimidating threats that he received.
7. The school was making a real attempt to match teaching styles and learning styles.